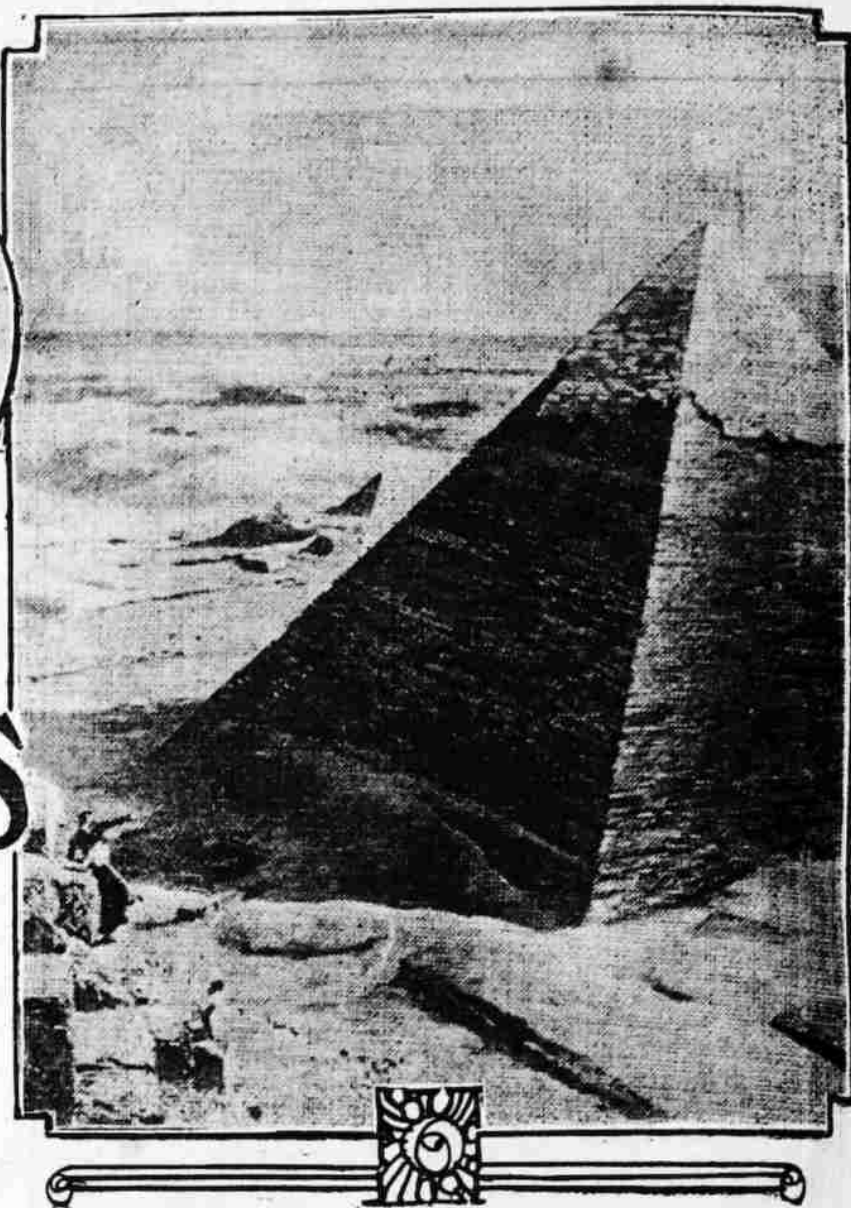


The Pyramid Builders of America



GERHARD SISTERS PHOTO.

BY HARRY L. WELLS.
So far as any knowledge can be gathered from anything left behind, civilization in the great Mississippi Valley began with a race called Mound Builders, from want of any better designation. This name was derived from the fact that there exist throughout the valley thousands of mounds, large and small, from small tumuli to gigantic structures of complex architecture, built by aboriginal tribes of a period reaching indefinitely into antiquity.

Who were the Mound Builders? That is a question which has been asked for many years and has received many answers. Ethnologically they have not been connected with any race living elsewhere, and, unless they were the ancestors of some of the later Indian tribes, there is no knowledge of them at all not contained in the great earthworks they constructed. Like the wind, men know not whence they came nor whither they went.

While we are asking questions, where did the present race of American Indians come from? If they drove out the Mound Builders, or if they drove out the people who did drive out the Mound Builders, whence came they, and whence came their predecessors?

There is a general disposition to try to trace all colonization of America to voyagers from Asia, either across the upper reaches of the vast Pacific by way of the Japan current, or across the narrow Behring Straits. Most of this effort is based upon the idea that man was created only 6,000 years ago in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates, and that he has, in that period of 6,000 years, invaded every nook and corner of the world by a process of migration, differentiating under the various environments in which he came, until we have the races, tribes and nationalities of today, black, white, yellow, red and coffee colored. But ethnologists very well know that 6,000 years are entirely too short a period in which to accomplish such dispersion and such differentiation of race and color. Man has been in the differentiation process many thousands of years longer than that.

Therefore, it does not seem necessary to go to Asia to find any recent ancestors of the Mound Builders or any similarity of customs which will link them with known races of other continents. The probabilities are that man has inhabited the American continent for a great many thousands of years, during which time races may have developed and decayed, and that what civilization the Mound Builders had was a development of their own and not brought with them from some other continent.

Because the Mound Builders constructed huge earth mounds it has been imagined that they were of Thuringian origin, of the same general race as the Chinese, Tartars and Mongols, which also had the mound building habit for burial purposes. The same arguments would apply to other and quite different tribes of Indians of much later time, such as the Iroquois and Algonquins, whose burial mounds are to be found by the thousands across the Northern States from Iowa to New York.

Besides, the Mound Builders did not build their mounds for burial primarily, but, apparently, chiefly for religious purposes. Because of this, and because some of them were in a part pyramidal form, like



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the great mound at Cahokia, Illinois, fancy has also been busy connecting them with the Egyptians. It is the same fancy which connects the Aztecs and other pyramid building tribes of Central America with the ancestors of the Ptolemies.

Perhaps fancy, using many facts as a warp for its web, never painted a more graphic picture connecting the mound and pyramid building American races with the ancient civilization of Egypt, than is contained in the book by Ignatius Donnelly called "Atlantis." In that book, written some thirty or more years ago, Plato's lost island is made the birthplace of a great civilization, from which emigrants spread to the continents on both sides of the ocean, to be severed completely when the great mother island sank into the ocean depths. From that time on civilization advanced in the East and retrograded in the West. That would give us ancestors for our Mound Builders, and, if we must have a specific explanation of Mound Builder civilization based upon the theory that it came from outside, that is as good as any.

RELIGIOUS CONDITION SHOWS CIVILIZATION.

Nothing has yet been learned to prove that the Mound Builders, as well as our present day Indians, were not the descendants, or the ascendants of primitive races on the American continent for many thousands of years. Even were we to accept the theory that they were related to the Mongols because they built earth mounds, or to the Egyptians because some of their mounds resemble pyramids, that would still leave us in the dark as to the ancestry of other American races, whose traditions throw no light upon the subject, save that they came from the West and

North, apparently only a few hundred years ago. The Indian is still here, and the Mound Builder is gone, unless his degenerate descendants may be found in the tribes which formerly inhabited the Southern States, such as the Cherokees, Creeks, Seminoles, etc., or the Aztecs, Toltecs, Mayas, etc., of Mexico, but the origin of both is shrouded in mystery.

The Mound Builders had reached a comparatively high stage of civilization when they were destroyed, or driven out, by a more primitive, but virile, race. When a race develops its religious sense to the point where it has a priesthood and builds huge works for religious ceremonies and expression, it has made great progress. That was the point reached by the Mound Builders, and not reached by the Indian tribes which our explorers found occupying the country of the Mound Builders three centuries ago.

A study of the mounds shows they were not built for defensive purposes, though that is the first thought which naturally comes in to the mind. They were not located at defensive spots nor where the topography lent itself to defense. Most of them are in valleys. There are plenty of defensive

mounds to be found in the region bordering the great lakes, from the Mississippi to the Hudson, located on hills and ridges, and there are plenty of small burial tumuli, but these were constructed by another and later race, more primitive and warlike. The huge mounds in the valleys were not built for those purposes, though small burial mounds inside the confines of the large ones may be found.

The mounds are not forts, but are "often complicated in architecture, containing many squares, circles, parallel ways, altars and platforms, extending over a great range of territory, and evidently connected, having some religious significance, both in their structure and in their locality" (Peet). "De Soto and other early explorers convey the impression that the Indians they encountered occupied structures built by another and higher race."

The mounds differ in different localities. They have been divided into five general classes by location and character. The first class is called "Emblematic" and is to be found in Wisconsin. These resemble animal forms, nearly every animal known to that region being represented in one or more mounds.



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It is possible the animal was a crest or token of a particular tribe or family. The use of totems is still preserved among the Indians of that region and elsewhere. Longfellow, in "Hiawatha," speaks of the Indian families having "Each his own ancestral totem, figures of the bear and muskrat, of the turtle, crane and beaver." Nearly every person has seen one of those huge totems brought from Alaska, carved from the trunk of a cedar

tree, or pictures of them at least. The totem is the family crest. These emblematic mounds in Wisconsin are supposed to be the totems of the tribes building them.

CAHOKIA MOUND GREATEST OF ALL.

South of Wisconsin and extending into Ohio and as far south as its mouth in Illinois, are to be found innumerable tumuli, built on the open prairies and therefore not primarily for defense, though some of them are on the tops of hills and no doubt combined defense with burial purposes. Some are quite massive, though most of them are small. By far the greatest of these is the Cahokia mound, often called "Monk's Mound," because in pioneer times Trappist monks lived there while on missionary service among the Indians.

Cahokia is the name of a great Indian chief of the days of the white man. This shows that the name of the mound is a comparatively recent one. What the Indians of early times, or the builders themselves called it is not known. The mound is 780x1080 feet in size and 104 feet high, containing 84,000,000 cubic feet of earth. It is believed that a portion of the mound is a natural formation, but even in that event its construction represents an immense amount of organized and directed labor. A

fourth class of mounds are found from the Ohio River south to the Cumberland and Tennessee and extending from the Mississippi to the Allegheny Mountains. This is a wooded region and mountainous and the mounds are clearly of a military character. They were once thought to be a chain of De Soto forts, until the absurdity and impossibility of De Soto building them was realized. Being military and not religious, they were probably built by others than the more highly developed race which built the Ohio and the Cahokia mounds, or else were their degenerate descendants, which is not likely, as degenerates are not usually military. It is more probable that a more virile and military race drove out the peaceful, religious Mound Builders and occupied their country. That is the order of history as it has revealed elsewhere. These more military Mound Builders were themselves driven out or exterminated later by the ancestors of the present Indians, probably, though there is no proof except that of the assumed more recent appearance of the Indians.

The fifth set of mounds are those found along the Gulf coast. They are pyramidal in character and distinctive in form, and indicate the work of a different race from that which built ordinary tumuli and defensive works also found in that region. It is sometimes assumed that these mounds were built by the original Mound Builders of the Ohio Valley after they had been driven south by wilder tribes and had somewhat retrograded, but that is only speculation, as is also the idea that the southern tribes were descendants of this mound building race. In the great sweep of time and the changing character of populations, there is room for so many migrations and irruptions of race after race, that discussion of such things is mere speculation. For all we know a dozen different races may have occupied the Mississippi Valley during the thousands of years it has been habitable by man.

When white men first landed upon American soil and began exploring the country, they found a wide distribution of the present American Indian, divided into a multitude of tribes, many of them showing close affinity in the similarity of their languages. Two great families comprehended more than any others. These were the Algonquins and Iroquois. The Indians of the Upper Mississippi Valley were of the great Algonquin who had thought of smashing the Dakotas southeast clear to the Atlantic Coast of New Jersey, Delaware and Virginia. Old Powhatan, who has thoughts of smashing the head of Capt. John Smith with a club, and only desisted because of the petitions of the lovely Pocahontas, was an Algonquin. So, also, were Tecumseh, Logan, Black Hawk, Pontiac and other noted Indians of these later times.

earth instead of stone.

By far the most intricately constructed mounds are to be found in Ohio and just south of the river in Kentucky. Walls and platforms, truncated pyramids and altars, graded ways, sacred inclosures, some circular, some square and some with parallel walls and complicated circles and altars, form a mysterious and strange combination of works, which no one has been able to explain. It all indicates the rule of a powerful priesthood. The minds and traditions of the Indians found there by the pioneer white men were blank of the subject of the builders.

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Both the Algonquins and the Iroquois races, according to their own traditions, came from the unknown West and North and drove out the people then occupying the rich valley, but there is nothing in their traditions to show that those they drove out were a more highly civilized race. On the contrary, they seem to indicate that the people then here were occupying villages and structures they knew no more about as to their origin than did the Indians who drove them out.